

## BOOK REVIEW

Published in Vihangama 2001 Vol. III (May - June)



## COOMARASWAMY'S WRITINGS ON GEOLOGY AND MINEROLOGY



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Thirteenth in the Series of Collected Works of Dr. Anand K. Coomaraswamy in the IGNCA's publication programme, this volume deals with his contribution to the Geology and Mineralogy of Ceylon (Sri Lanka).

Anand Kentish Coomaraswamy (he will be designated by his initials AKC) was born in Colombo, Ceylon, on August 22, 1877. His father, Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy, was one of the foremost men of his country; and mother, former Elizabeth Clay Beeby, an English woman of a wealthy Kent family. AKC's father passed away when he was not quite two. His mother returned to England in 1879 and settled in Kent and with the help of her mother and unmarried sister, she raised AKC and looked after his education until he went away at the age of 12 to Wycliffe College, a preparatory school in 1889. AKC attended this school for eight years, developing there strong interest in life sciences and geology. He used to spend much of his spare time in the quarries and clay pits exploring and hunting for fossils and other geological deposits of the part of Gloucestershire, where the school is located. He contributed a three page article to his school magazine *The Wycliffe Star* in April 1895 on "Geology of Doverrow Hill", - his first article to be published. Earlier, during the summer of 1894, AKC delivered a series of three lectures at Wycliffe school on "The Rhaetic Beds", and "Darwin's Theory of Evolution and Fossils: Their Formation and Significance".

In 1897, AKC joined the University College, London, and received in 1900 a B.Sc. Degree in Geology and Botany, with first class honours. It appears that by this time he had already visited Ceylon at his own expense, with the intention of surveying its mineral resources. His findings promoted the authorities in England and Ceylon to form a Mineralogical Survey of Ceylon, of which he became the first Director. His earliest publications in professional journals, dating from 1900, deal with geological data gathered in Ceylon and India. AKC's first formal scientific paper on "Ceylon Rocks And Graphite" was published in the August 1900 issue of the Quarterly Journal of the *Geological Society of London*.

AKC arrived in Ceylon in 1903, with his English wife, Ethel Mary Partridge, and settled in a bungalow just outside Kandy, situated in the Central highland of the Island. He spent most of his time in the field

conducting his traverses on foot and by bullock cart and thus came to know the minerals and rocks of Ceylon very intimately. He published geological maps; discovered workable occurrences of mica, graphite, moonstone, iron-ore, corundum and other minerals; and brought out Administrative Reports for four successive years. These Reports are considered to be classic on account of the varied wealth of information contained in them covering a wide range of geological mineralogical and petrological subjects. They contain, in addition, sketch maps, glossary of terms, and the plan of a Mineral Gallery. In addition, he published separate articles, which were published in learned journals, such as, the *Quarterly Journal of Geological Society*, London; *Geological Magazine*, London; *Mineralogical Magazine*, London; *Nature*, London; and *Spolica Zetanica*, Colombo.

Material in the present volume has been arranged in three sections: the first contains his articles on geology and mineralogy of Ceylon published in scientific journals; the second includes the classic Ceylon Administrative Reports which he brought out in 1903-06; and, the final section is mainly concerned with several comments on AKC's work - Letters to the Editors as well as scientific papers, which highlight his reputation as a mainstream geologist.

His greatest contribution to geology was his discovery of the mineral Thoriantie, an oxide of Thorium and Uranium in 1904. Madame Marie Curie, the Nobel Laureate, suggested in a letter to AKC that the new mineral ought to be named after him as "Coomarite", keeping in view the fact that some of the minerals discovered during the period were named after their discoverers. It was characteristic of AKC's self-effacement and scientific modesty that instead of immortalising his own name, he preferred to name it Thorianite.

In 1906, the University of London conferred on him the much-coveted degree of D.Sc., on his thesis composed of Official Reports on Ceylonese mineralogy and other scientific papers. He was the first Ceylonese to receive this distinction. Other honours followed; he was elected a Fellow of the Geological and Linnean Societies of London.

Mr. Ranganathan's well-directed efforts to draw the attention of Mrs. Indira Gandhi resulted in the issuance of a stamp by the Government of India in honour of the great scholar AKC in 1977, on the occasion of his birth Centenary.

It is hoped that this volume on AKC's contribution to the earth sciences, quite different from his undoubted greatness as an exponent of the Perennial Philosophy, will be of great interest to his innumerable admirers.

**Ananda K. Coomaraswamy - Writings on Geology and Mineralogy:  
Scientific Papers and Comments, Edited by  
A Ranganathan and K. Srinivasa Rao Co published  
by The IGNCA and Manohar Publishers &  
Distributors, New Delhi-2001,  
PP. xxix+319, Price: Rs.700/-**